Exploring cultural stereotypes in L2 pragmatics learning in a Japanese EFL context

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Biodata

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Abstract

In recent years, there has been increasing momentum towards a multilingual and intercultural turn within L2 pragmatics pedagogy and research which places emphasis on developing the productive and interpretive capacities necessary for engaging effectively with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds. This has foregrounded the need for development of learners' abilities to analyse and reflect on language use, particularly the ability to reflect on the ways that one's own judgments about pragmatic (in)appropriateness are intertwined with broader judgments about people. This chapter considers the relationship between social cognition and evaluations of language use, looking specifically at the role of cultural stereotypes in L2 learners' meta-pragmatic evaluations. The chapter first elaborates a number of insights from recent theoretical work on the interfaces between social (particularly intergroup) cognition and the evaluative bases of pragmatic judgments. The chapter then draws on classroom data from an English language classroom in Japan to illustrate some of the ways in which cultural stereotypes of self and other mediate the ways a small group of intermediate English language learners evaluate pragmatic phenomena.

Introduction

The field of L2 pragmatics has been strongly influenced by the 'interlanguage perspective' on learning, which tends to emphasise incremental movement towards a native speaker norm based on a monolingual view of the mind (Cook 1997). However, there is now increasing momentum towards a multilingual and intercultural turn within L2 pragmatics pedagogy and research which places less emphasis on nativelikeness and more emphasis on developing the productive and interpretive capacities necessary for engaging effectively with individuals from diverse linguistic and cultural backgrounds (e.g. Ishihara 2010; Ishihara & Menard-Warwick 2018; Koutlaki & Eslami 2018; Liddicoat 2017; McConachy 2018; McConachy & Liddicoat 2016, Forthcoming; Taguchi & Ishihara 2018). This involves increased recognition of the fact that intercultural communication through the medium of an L2 is not necessarily achieved through a process of convergence on standard language forms but is rather dynamically negotiated by participants in interaction on the basis of pre-existing knowledge and knowledge that is constructed through interaction (Kecskes 2014). This is a particularly important theoretical understanding for the field of ELT, given the truly diverse speakership of the English language and the fact that speakers of English throughout the world bring to their interactions diverse conceptions of social relationships, assumptions about interpersonal rights and obligations, and preferences for carrying out social acts and indexing identity through language (Mak & Chui 2013).

From a pedagogical perspective, the diversification of the speakership of English has led to recognition of the importance of problematising highly normative views of language within language learning materials and amongst language learners themselves (Baker 2017). If learners are socialised into a view of the English language as an entity whose norms are fixed, uncontested, and ideally adhered to by all speakers, it will inhibit their ability to engage with diversity and potentially lead to negative judgments of those who appear to adopt unexpected strategies for indexing politeness, carrying out speech acts etc. It is for this reason that there have recently there have been many calls for language learners to be introduced to pragmatic variation across different varieties of English and lingua franca contexts of English language use, and to consider the implications of this variation for their own language use (e.g. Taguchi & Ishihara 2018; van Compernolle & McGregor 2016). Whilst this is valuable, the focus tends to remain on learners' awareness of the L2 language system and its use. Conversely, a multilingual and intercultural orientation aims to brings to the fore learners' own assumptions about normative language use across the different languages within their communicative

repertoire, especially the L1, given the particularly powerful influence that assumptions about social relationships drawn from the L1 have on L2 language use. Within learning, this involves the reflexive task of learners gaining insight into how their own perceptions of social relationships shape their interpretation of pragmatic meanings, judgments of (in)appropriateness, and evaluations of other people within and across languages (McConachy 2019).

Recently, more research is emerging which focuses on the reflexive ways that language learners themselves articulate their interpretations of language use with reference to features of the sociocultural context and underlying normative assumptions about the social world (e.g. Henery 2015; McConachy 2018, 2019; McConachy & Liddicoat 2016; Liddicoat & McConachy 2019; Morollon Marti & Fernandez 2016; van Compernolle 2014). This work has helped to reveal how learners' conceptions of social roles and relationships, including issues of power and distance, influence their judgments of the appropriateness of different pragmatic features in a range of contexts. However, to this point, there has been little explicit discussion of the ways in which cultural stereotypes inform learners' judgments about language use. Given that cultural stereotypes are a powerful constituent of social cognition that shape the interpretation of behaviour, it is important to understand more specifically how language learners' cultural stereotypes impact on the way they perceive speaker identities and the appropriateness of particular pragmatic choices.

This chapter draws on data from an English language classroom in Japan to highlight some of the ways in which cultural assumptions and stereotypes of self and other mediate learners' interpretation of pragmatic phenomena within classroom learning. The chapter first provides a discussion of the role of social cognition in pragmatic evaluation and outlines key features of the ideological landscape of English education in Japan which are relevant to the empirical context of this chapter.

Pragmatic evaluations, social cognition and cultural stereotypes

The discursive turn within the field of pragmatics (particularly work on politeness) has helped foreground the fact that pragmatic meanings are actively constructed and interpreted by individuals in interaction. This has helped generate new lines of thinking within interpersonal pragmatics concerning the ways that individuals make evaluations of language use in terms of morally valenced categories such as (im)politeness, (in)appropriateness, (in)directness, and so

on. Research has also helped reveal the cognitive architecture that underpins individuals' judgments about the contextual (in)appropriateness of language use, including the cultural knowledge, frames of reference, and deep assumptions that shape evaluations (E.g. Kadar & Haugh 2013; McConachy 2018; Spencer-Oatey & Kadar 2016, Forthcoming).

One significant insight is that there is a close relationship between evaluations of language use and perceptions of people. Evaluations regarding the appropriateness of language use are not simply based on judgments as to whether language use conforms to conventions or not. Since language use is a form of behaviour, the actions that constitute everyday discourse, such as speech acts, forms of social deixis, and interactional routines, serve to maintain (or threaten) interpersonal relations and the social structures within which they are nested. It is for this reason that evaluations of language use are shaped by the ways that individuals categorise each other in terms of interpersonal roles and relationships and how they perceive the nature and scope of mutual rights and responsibilities attached to these roles and relationships (Spencer-Oatey & Kadar 2016). That is, evaluations of language use are closely tied to the expectations that individuals have regarding the treatment they can expect from others in roles such as teacher, student, friend, doctor etc., dependent on other variables such as gender, age, location, level of trust, and more. It is for this reason that language use that appears to contravene expectations beyond a particular threshold level is likely to not only trigger a judgment of pragmatic inappropriateness but also lead to a morally charged judgment about the individual (Spencer-Oatey & Kadar Forthcoming).

Of particular importance to this chapter is the insight that perceptions of 'appropriateness' are strongly influenced by social cognition, such as the group affiliations and social identity characteristics speakers see themselves and their interlocutors as having, including cultural categorisation. Consequently, whether pragmatic behaviour is viewed as appropriate or inappropriate (or how in/appropriate) can depend on the degree to which an interlocutor is viewed as representing a particular social or cultural group and the particular cognitions and attitudes the speaker has towards that group (Kadar 2017; McConachy 2018). Needless to say, in intercultural encounters and in the process of L2 learning, pragmatic evaluations are often filtered through the lens of cultural stereotypes of self and other. This is frequently (but not exclusively) the case when so-called intercultural misunderstandings occur. It is common for individuals to drawn on essentialist notions of cultural difference in order to attribute responsibility for interactional difficulties or lack of success to the cultural characteristics of

other groups (e.g. Angouri 2018; Langstedt 2018). This means that group members are assumed to possess the same characteristics, and it is these characteristics that are used as an explanatory variable for behaviour. This tends to involve recourse to discourses that present cultural groups as inherently embodying characteristics such as 'valuing hierarchy', 'being shy', 'being modest', 'being friendly' etc., which are presented as a barrier (Schnurr & Zayts 2017). Stereotypes about group characteristics function as ready-made explanations for difficulties, the explanation being that the 'other' is irreconcilably different to 'us'. Such a conception relies both on cultural stereotypes about us (auto-stereotypes) and stereotypes about others (hetero-stereotypes). Auto-stereotypes also come into play in intercultural situations where individuals wish to rationalise their own communicative choices or judgments of the other by attributing it to an underlying characteristic or fundamental moral concern shared by members of one's own social or cultural group (Spencer-Oatey & Xing 2019). In these senses, the interpretation of pragmatic meaning and evaluation of language use is intertwined with intergroup psychology.

Contrary to traditional views of stereotypes as caused by attribution error, Hinton (2019) explains that cultural stereotypes are frequently developed through the process of socialisation as individuals internalise the cultural discourses dominant within the social environment, which are propagated for a variety of ideological purposes. The education system is one particular context in which individuals are exposed to signs and signification practices that serve the ideological purpose of constructing an embodied sense of (national) cultural identity, frequently in contradistinction to other cultural groups (Piller 2011). Although it might be usual to associate language education with the alleviation of stereotypes, ideological framings of language education and the ways in which language education is enacted can sometimes serve to reify cultural differences. It is for this reason that it is necessary to give consideration to the ideological landscape of English language education in Japan.

The ideological landscape of English language education in Japan
Within the Japanese EFL context, language-in-education policies and government schemes over the last two decades have explicitly attempted to locate goals for English language education within the context of globalisation, the concomitant use of English as an international lingua franca, and the need to foster skills for effective intercultural communication (MEXT 2002). However, it has been suggested that the rhetoric of English for intercultural communication within the Japanese educational context tends to mask the more fundamental

desire of the Japanese government to sustain economic competitiveness by producing 'global human resources' (Hashimoto 2009). Scholars have pointed out that whilst there appears to be a strong desire to develop individuals that can use English to function on a global stage, such individuals are simultaneously positioned as responsible for representing Japanese national identity, communicating Japanese perspectives abroad, and thereby furthering Japanese national interests (Liddicoat 2013). Intercultural communication through the medium of English thus tends to be constructed as a locus for communicating essentialised notions of Japaneseness to foreign others (Kubota 2019).

Such a view of intercultural relations reflects a trend within the broader ideological landscape to construct a clear distinction between Japan and foreign countries, based on assumptions about Japanese uniqueness and the incommensurability of Japanese language and culture with that of other countries (Kubota 1999). For example, the thesis of Japanese cultural distinctiveness is often employed within the Japanese media to explain the alleged difficulties that Japanese people have learning foreign languages and interacting with non-Japanese people. In this sense, ideologically constructed perceptions of the inherent characteristics of a people are used to explain not only what people can do but also what they cannot do. The flip side of this particular cultural stereotype is that it the Japanese language must then be uniquely difficult for non-Japanese people to master (Menard-Warwick & Leung 2017; Miller 1982).

Given the impact of social cognition on pragmatic evaluation and the fact that many cultural stereotypes tend to develop within the context of L1-based schooling, the importance of encouraging language learners to reflect on both the L1 and the L2 comes into particular focus. Traditionally, there has been little work that has attempted to link the learning of L2 pragmatics with issues of cultural stereotypes, though the ways in which learners categorise themselves and others as cultural beings has a significant impact on expectations that are applied to communicative behaviour. The next section will provide several extracts from classroom-based interactions which show how cultural stereotypes surfaced in collaborative reflection on language use – in this case, the learners' L1 of Japanese.

The data and pedagogical context

All of the extracts presented in this chapter derive from classroom interactions that took place during a course on English communication skills taught by this author over 10 weeks at a study abroad preparation institute in Tokyo, Japan. The full dataset consisted of 16 hours of audio

The course participants were four Japanese learners aged 20-25 who had intermediate level English (IELTS 5.5) and who hoped to eventually progress to undergraduate or postgraduate study overseas. The course was offered by the institute to help such learners increase their awareness of the communicative conventions of the English language, to bolster the development of the four skills, and to cultivate intercultural awareness.

Throughout the course, students were continually encouraged to reflect on and articulate how they themselves interpret the significance of linguistic choices evident in the textbook, teacher-made dialogues, and their own interactions inside and outside the classroom. Reflection was not limited to the English language, but learners were also actively encouraged to reflect on Japanese language use across a range of social and regional contexts. This multilingual orientation meant that cross-linguistic and cross-cultural comparison became a salient feature of learning, which frequently led to meta-pragmatic analysis that invoked broader notions of cultural difference. In fact, it was not uncommon for learners to draw on essentialist notions of culture and cultural difference when justifying their interpretations of language use. The next section will illustrate and discuss the interface between cultural stereotypes and pragmatic judgments; namely, the ways that cultural stereotypes learners hold in relation to different cultural groups influence their perception of pragmatic behaviours.

Stereotypes of self and other in meta-pragmatic talk

The analysis of Extracts 1 and 2 focuses on the ways that learners engage with a teacher-constructed dialogue that depicts an intercultural interaction in the Japanese language. Specifically, it looks at how cultural stereotypes are utilised as explanatory resources when learners articulate their perceptions of the appropriateness of pragmatic choices within the scenario. Although it is not necessarily unusual to ask English language learners to reflect on interactional examples in the target language, it may be less common to ask students to reflect on examples from their L1, particularly intercultural scenarios. It appears that reflection on the L1serves as a unique way of making the familiar strange and appears to trigger intergroup perceptions that become intertwined with pragmatic judgments.

The dialogue that learners are working with was written in Japanese by the author in order to depict a short fictional exchange at a train station in Tokyo between a young Australian man

(James) and an older Japanese woman (Kazuko). This exchange is launched by Kazuko as she approaches James in Japanese with the "Where are you from?" question, which is known as highly salient in intercultural encounters, or encounters that are at least perceived to be marked by ethnic or cultural differences (e.g. Zhu & Li 2016). James is presented in the dialogue as being of relatively limited proficiency in Japanese, which is evident in a number of grammatical and phonological errors. Yet, his basic responses in Japanese are met by praise by Kazuko, which James then attempts to dismiss. This dialogue taps into a commonly reported phenomenon amongst non-native (particularly Caucasian) speakers of Japanese that even simple use of Japanese very often elicits seemingly disproportionate praise from Japanese interlocutors. Such a phenomenon has been linked to ideologies of Japanese uniqueness that present Japanese as a uniquely difficult language for 'foreigners' to acquire due to the assumption of a close association between 'speaking Japanese' and 'being Japanese' (e.g. Minegishi Cook 2006; Menard-Warwick & Leung 2017). Thus, the dialogue acted as a stimulus for the learners to reflect on assumptions surrounding complimenting behaviour, as well as the impact of insider/outsider categorisations on expectations towards what is said and how it is said in an initial encounter with a 'foreigner'. The dialogue is available in Appendix 1. The talk below involves reflective discussion on the dialogue between all class participants.

Extract 1

1: Teacher	Okay, here you can just discuss what's happening in the conversation and also think about whether the lady's comment is appropriate or not.
2: Seiji	The first phrase is I think a little hard to understand for foreigner because "*Okuni ha dochira desu ka yori mo, doko desu ka or doko kara kimashita ka?*" is better. (It's better to ask '*doko desu ka*?' or '*doko kara kimashita ka*?' than '*okuni ha dochira desu ka*?').
3: Teacher	Maybe she's not used to talking to foreigners. She's not adjusting her language at all. How about the man's response? So, he says some strange Japanese, but what does she say?
4: Tai	Yeah, I heard that most students who learning Japanese learn when they were said "Your Japanese is good", they learn they have to say "not so much". So, I'm just curious he thinks about this.

5: Teacher	Yeah. Maybe he really thinks that his Japanese is bad because it is bad. I mean in this case, he can't say the name of his country properly. It's not terrible. Maybe he has just come to Japan, but it's not "*jyouzu*" (good).
6: Hikari	But I think this is very funny because she just asked in Japanese language and of course the foreigners couldn't answer well, but I think the woman is very usual Japanese woman because she think the Japanese language is really difficult for every foreigners, so maybe she thought maybe her language level for foreigners is very low, and she thought he was good at speaking Japanese.
7: Teacher	So, do you think that he felt good about her comment?
8: Tai	Maybe not.
9: Teacher	Maybe not? Why not?
10: Tai	He knows about his Japanese speaking level.
11: Teacher	Right? What do you think about that?
12: Tai	I think he knows it is ulterior motive.

It can be seen in this extract that the category of 'foreigner' was made relevant very quickly by students as a conceptual anchor to represent the intercultural dimension of this interaction, and this served to shape the trajectory by which issues of appropriateness were framed. Seiji is the first to orient to this task by looking at the appropriateness of Kazuko's initial greeting from the perspective of whether it might be too grammatically complex for a 'foreigner'. This identity abstraction from 'James' to 'foreigner' sets the tone for the rest of the discussion, as the teacher attempts to work with this category in line 3 by pointing out the lack of linguistic adjustments – or foreigner talk (Ferguson, 1972) – may be evidence of lack of contact with 'foreigners'. The teacher then aims to shift the focus to James's use of Japanese and that it contains errors. Interestingly, however, the learners pay no attention to the errors, but Tai instead wonders whether James's rejection of Kazuko's compliment is due to awareness of compliment-response norms in Japanese, which tend to involve rejections (e.g. Sato 2017). The apparent disparity between James's language ability and the fact that he was complimented on the same has not been taken up in the discussion. The teacher attempts to encourage the learners to consider the possibility that James's rejection of the compliment may have been based on truthful perception rather than modesty, as his Japanese is certainly not 'jyouzu' (very good), as Kazuko remarked. It is at this point (line 6) that Hikari develops a very different take on the issue of 'appropriateness', expressing amusement at the fact that Kazuko even spoke to

a foreigner such as James in Japanese. Here Hikari clearly articulates the ideological proposition that it is only natural for a foreigner to struggle with Japanese, and it is likely that Kazuko understands this as a Japanese person. Thus, for Hikari, Kazuko's compliment may be seen as the result of inevitably low expectations vis-à-vis foreigners speaking Japanese, which would be more broadly shared (Menard-Warwick & Leung 2017). At this point (line 7) the teacher shifts students' attention more towards the likely perlocutionary effect of the seemingly disproportionate compliment, in response to which Tai suggests that James is likely not happy about it, as he knows the reality of his own Japanese (lines 10-12). This was followed by a period of silence of 26 seconds as all students began looking at the dialogue closely again to consider how James might have felt. Extract 2 shows the trajectory of discussion that then emerged. Notably, this time, reflection on James's likely uptake of the compliment triggers a shift in perception.

Extract 2

1: Hikari	Now I realize that the man just want to show his irritate. He doesn't feel good because of the Japanese lady's words.
2: Teacher	How do you know?
3: Hikari	From the conversation. But at the first time I read this conversation I thought if the conversation happened to Japanese, from foreigner to Japanese, so for example, "Can you speak English?" and I say "Oh, not so much". And the foreigner maybe say "You are good at speaking English" and maybe I say "No. No".
4: Teacher	Well, let's think about that. So, I could say "Can you speak English" and you could say "Ah, English is no", and then I could say "Oh, it's good!".
5: ALL	(laughing)
6: Teacher	How would you feel?
7: Hikari	Ah, behind my face…. I feel good…..
8: Teacher	[Oh, really?]
9: Hikari	….about such a words.
10: Teacher	Really? I usually don't feel good when I hear this comment. Because I mean, if I'm having a very difficult discussion in Japanese then I guess it doesn't matter, but if I just say "*ocha wo kudasai*" (some tea please), you know I feel it's strange for someone to say that is especially good Japanese.

		It's no big deal right? I kind of feel like it's "*baka ni shite iru*" (making fun of me).
11:	Seiji	Many people in Japan, um, might guess that foreigner don't even try to speak Japanese well, so it's just surprising. So, they might say it.
12:	Teacher	Yeah, many people have that image.
13:	Misato	So, even when foreigners say "*ohayou gozaimasu*" (good morning) or "*arigatou gozaimasu*" (thank you), many Japanese say, "Oh it's good".
14:	Tai	But, when I was working, many foreigners come my shops and most of them can speak Japanese. So, yeah, I noticed about this.
15:	Teacher	Oh? Do you try to speak to them in English first?
16:	Tai	No. I speak Japanese first. So, if she or he can't speak Japanese, I change to speaking English.

Interestingly, after further reflection, Hikari shifts her interpretation of James's likely reaction somewhat and reveals the basis of her earlier interpretation. It seems that when considering the appropriateness of the language in the dialogue, Hikari found it useful to picture herself as the recipient of a compliment from a 'foreigner'. Thus, she has constructed an inversion of the scenario in her mind as an interpretative strategy and reflected on her own reactions likely to occur. Thus, the assumption of an intergroup encounter continues to act as a top-down framing for consideration of language use. In line 4, the teacher works with this interpretative strategy by providing a potential illustration to Hikari, to which she responds (lines 7-9) that she would personally be happy receiving a compliment on her English even if her skill level were basic. This reflective trajectory thus helps reveal how her own assumptions about complimenting in an intercultural scenario interacted with her strategy of personalising the scenario for the purposes of interpretation. At this point (line 10), the teacher also adopts a personalisation strategy as an L2 Japanese speaker and reveals that he tends to interpret compliments about insignificant achievements to be condescending. Interesting, this leads Seiji to rearticulate the likelihood that many Japanese people would regard the use of Japanese itself as a surprising achievement, which Misato also affirms in line 13, commenting that the use of simple Japanese greetings by a foreigner is likely to elicit praise. Thus, the ideological notion that the Japanese language is uniquely difficult for foreigners is again suggested to constitute a widely available interpretative repertoire that, in this case, informs complimenting behaviour. There is an important juncture at this point in the discussion, as Tai draws on his own experience of interacting with foreign customers in a customer-service setting and reveals how his awareness

that many of these customers actually speak Japanese has made him more sensitive to issues of language choice. Specifically, his experiences have led him to use Japanese as the default language of communication unless it appears that a foreigner customer cannot understanding Japanese. Thus, he reports on his own shift in perception and new interactional strategies that stemmed from this shift, which serves to challenge the cultural stereotype about 'foreigners' speaking Japanese which had framed most of the discussion in extract 1 and 2.

Extract 3

This extract represents discussion amongst the same class participants as the previous extracts. Here, however, students are discussing issues of politeness in Japanese customer service, which had emerged as a topic of interest in a previous class. During that class, Tai, who works in customer service, had expressed frustration about customers who seemingly ignore staff members' efforts to interact with them, which he perceived to be a dominant trend in Japan. In the discussion below, students explore the evaluative notion of impoliteness (rudeness) with reference to the customer-service context and cultural explanations.

1: Teacher   Tai, I remember before you said that you get irritated by customers who don't say much when you serve them. So I want to ask you all, generally do you feel that the customers are rude in Japan? If you are just watching other customers, do you feel that they are rude?

2: Tai   60 or 70% are rude.

3: Teacher   Yeah? Why do you feel they're rude exactly?

4: Tai   I feel they don't think that I'm a human

5: Teacher   Not worthy of respect?

6: Tai   Um, they don't think I have feeling.

7: Teacher   Yeah, when I first came to Japan that was my impression too. They, I felt that the customers treat them like they don't have feelings. They ask them a question, like you know, "*atatamemasuka?*" (Shall I warm this up?), and they don't say yes or no. If they don't say anything it means yes, I guess. Or maybe they moved their face a little bit that I couldn't see. But they didn't say "*onegaishimasu*" (yes, please) or "*kekkou desu*" (no, thanks). They didn't say anything like that. That was my first impression.

8: Seiji   Oh…..Um, I think the Japanese tend to be more shy compared with Western people and the Japanese tend to, um, tend to want some…

9: Tai   distance?

10: Seiji   …distance between staff and customer because they don't know each other, so they might think that they don't have to be, like, friendly.

11: Teacher   Right. Yeah.

12: Seiji   So, I don't think it's rude, but, um, I want it to be kind of changed.

13: Teacher   Yeah, I know what you're saying. I think that is probably not shyness. Shyness is usually when you want to talk, but you can't. Like, you think "I want to talk more" to some people, but "I can't do it". Probably, what you're saying, it's interesting, you could say it's social distance. (Writes it on the board). So you feel comfortable if there is some distance between you and the staff perhaps.

14: Tai   Yeah, I think social distance is actually correct in Japan because at Gap, ah, my elder ask us to communicate with customers like "This is good clothing", but someone, I say, for example "This is nice", it depends on person, but most of them feel uncomfortable.

In line 1, the teacher attempts to generate a reflective trajectory by building on Tai's earlier comments on Japanese customer service and asking all students to consider whether they align with his view. On the surface, the act of asking students to evaluate a generalisation about 'customers in Japan' may appear to run the risk of perpetuating cultural essentialism due to the scale of attribution. However, from a different perspective, given that this language is a re-articulation of a comment from Tai, it also provides an opportunity to unpack the idea from a slightly more critical perspective through collaborative reflection. In line 2, Tai downgrades his initial assessment to some degree by remarking that he views 60-70% of customers as 'rude', though it can be seen in lines 3-6 that attempts to elicit examples of impoliteness views instead elicit his views as to the motivations behind alleged impoliteness. Tai's perception is that customers view him in his role as service provider in a lowly way, which leads to disregard for his feelings. At this point (line 7) the teacher aligns with Tai's assessment to some degree, providing some of his own observations concerning interactional patterns in customer service which are marked by minimal responses by the customer.

This illustration appears to stimulate a new trajectory within the discussion that is oriented more towards cultural explanation, as Seiji chimes in with the view that Japanese are more 'shy' than Westerners, which leads them to want more 'distance' between people. As he

elaborates in line 10, Seiji suggests that the inherent shyness of Japanese people leads to a preference for 'distance', which in turn means that it becomes unnecessary to be 'friendly'. In this way, Seiji constructs an explanation for role-based (customer) behaviour that is rooted in an inherent personality feature of Japanese people. The notion that 'shyness' is an inherent characteristic of Japanese people is a well-known cultural stereotype frequently articulated in the Japanese media to explain a variety of cultural phenomena (not least of which is the alleged difficulty that Japanese people have with foreign languages), and has been shown to be a widely held belief amongst Japanese people (e.g. Hirai 1999). It is interesting that although Seiji sees the situation as natural, he would prefer if it were different. Notable in this discussion is that the framing of the comparison is based on the dichotomous cultural categories of 'Japanese' and 'Western'. Whilst this is a slightly narrower frame for comparison than 'foreigner' in extract one and two, it nevertheless functions to construct perceptions of Japaneseness in contradistinction to a cultural other (Kubota 1999).

In line 13 of this extract the teacher suggests that the 'shyness' explanation could be better replaced by utilising the notion of 'social distance'. Whilst the former would imply an immutable characteristic of an entire people, the latter is a culturally derived preference for social interactions within particular contexts. Tai aligns with this explanatory framing in line 14, drawing on his own experience in customer service to illustrate that attempts to initiate interactions with customers on a more personal footing are often met with awkwardness. Thus, over the last two turns of the classroom interaction there is a move away from a cultural stereotype as primary explanation towards a more focused, context-sensitive explanation.

Discussion

As seen in the three extracts presented in this chapter, attributions of 'politeness' or 'inappropriateness' are inextricably linked with learners' ways of assessing the sociocultural context of an interaction and the expectations vis-à-vis linguistic behaviour that arise as a result of this assessment. As has been the focus in this chapter, pragmatic judgments are closely linked to social cognition and intergroup cognition, in that perceptions of the defining characteristics of social and cultural groups function as a filter when individuals evaluate the significance and appropriateness of communicative choices (Spencer-Oatey & Xing 2019). That is, learners' evaluations of language use are influenced by the ways they categorise speakers in social and cultural terms, as such categorisation inevitably leads to different expectations about what individuals can and cannot do.

In Extract 1 and 2, the category of 'foreigner' functions as a cognitive frame for activating and rationalising (low) expectations vis-à-vis non-native speakers of Japanese, which consequently influences the ways in which students interpret the significance of the complimenting behaviour contained within the dialogue. In Extract 3, the perceived tendency of Japanese customers wishing to avoid communicating with shop staff was attributed to the inherent 'shyness' of Japanese people, discursively constructed through comparison with 'Western people'. Hetero-stereotypes about 'foreigners' or 'Westerners' not only mediate the ways that learners perceive the characteristics of individuals thus categorised, they also function as a cognitive and discursive resource for consolidating auto-stereotypes about Japanese people. These categorisations and the assumptions that go along with them resonate with ideological conceptions prevalent in Japanese educational and media discourses, specifically the tendency to emphasise Japanese uniqueness in contradistinction to the West and the related tendency to present the Japanese language as uniquely difficult for foreigners and the English language as uniquely difficult for Japanese people (Kubota 1999). Such ideological frames contribute to cultural stereotypes and an intergroup psychology that surfaces as a pervasive element in the interpretation and evaluation of language use in the extracts presented in this chapter.

Implications for English Language Education

This chapter has presented classroom interactions which involved Japanese learners of English reflecting on L1 language use, which might seem to be an unconventional pedagogical practice if it is assumed that learners should be focused on the L2. However, as has been discussed in this chapter, elements of cognition anchored in experiences of L1 use and socialisation are inevitably brought to bear in L2 interpretation and use, including cultural stereotypes. Thus, if the aim of L2 pragmatics teaching is to develop multilingual individuals who are sensitive to the diverse ways that individuals use and interpret language, we shouldn't hesitate to create opportunities for learners to reflect on the pragmatics of their L1 and identify the bases of their own judgments about pragmatic appropriateness. In fact, given that most learners' important experiences of the world are likely to have been mediated by L1 interaction, reflection on L1 pragmatics may be a particularly powerful way of tapping into learners' assumptions about the social world.

Whether reflecting on the L1 or the L2, there is a particularly important role for encouraging learners to verbalise their perceptions of pragmatic appropriateness in connection to the roles,

relationships, and identities of speakers, particularly in relation to interactions that involve speakers from different cultural backgrounds. Collaborative reflection tasks that involve learners talking through their evaluative judgments in relation to such aspects of context are particularly conducive to eliciting stereotypes pertaining to language, gender, culture, which can then be critically considered (McConachy 2018).

Conclusion

This chapter began by commenting on the emergence of a multilingual and intercultural turn within L2 pragmatics pedagogy and research which emphasises the holistic development of the learners' communicative repertoire and the ability to actively observe, analyse, and reflect on language use in context. It has also illustrated some of the ways in which cultural stereotypes mediate learners' perceptions of pragmatic behaviour and evaluative judgments about pragmatic appropriateness. Given the impact of social cognition on pragmatic evaluation, L2 pragmatics learning is an important context for reflecting on and (as necessary) challenging stereotypes that are likely to lead to prejudicial views of the abilities of others based on their cultural affiliation or social categorisation as 'foreigner', 'immigrant', 'refugee' etc, as well as challenging stereotypes of self and other that lead to binary intercultural thinking.

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Additional Readings

Hinton, P. (2019). *Stereotypes and the Construction of the Social World*. London: Routledge. This book is a comprehensive account of traditional views of stereotypes as attribution errors and more recent views of stereotypes as cultural constructions. The book is critical of research which sees stereotypes as the outcome of faulty functioning of human cognition, and particularly argues for the need to see the notion of stereotypes through a political lens. The book provides lucid discussion of the impact of ideology on the kinds of ideas that come to be regarded as 'stereotypes' and why stereotypes should be seen as cultural products that reflect the biases of society at a given time. The book will be useful for those working in language education and intercultural communication who wish to develop a comprehensive understanding of the cognitive and political dimensions of stereotypes. In connection to this chapter, this book provides useful theoretical support for the view of stereotypes as ideologically constructed.

Spencer-Oatey, H. & Kadar, D.Z., (Forthcoming, 2021). *Intercultural Politeness: Relating across Cultures*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

This book presents cutting-edge theoretical developments on intercultural politeness and relational work from based on insights in social psychology, moral psychology, and pragmatics. Compared to work that is heavily based on linguistic description of politeness, this book aims to explore the complex relationships between culture and perceptions of linguistic behaviour that lead to evaluative judgments and attributions of (im)politeness. Given that the sociopragmatic dimensions of politeness judgments are under-theorised within pragmatics, especially L2 pragmatics, this book will be of much use to researchers in language education and applied linguistics more broadly. The book links particularly well with the arguments in this chapter regarding the need for learners to better understand the bases of their own evaluative judgments.

McConachy, T. & Spencer-Oatey, H. (2020). Developing pragmatic awareness. In K.P. Schneider & E. Ifantidou (Eds.), Developmental and Clinical Pragmatics (*Handbook of Pragmatics, Vol. 13)*. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.

This chapter is a comprehensive review of the different theoretical and empirical approaches to the development of pragmatic awareness within the L2 literature. It divides the literature into three main paradigms: 'interlanguage', 'sociocultural', and 'intercultural', explaining key theoretical tenets within each paradigm and illustrative empirical studies. The focus of the chapter is not on pedagogical approaches to developing pragmatic awareness per se, but rather on what constitutes a developmental perspective on 'pragmatic awareness' within the three main paradigms. The chapter points out points of divergence and similarity, as well as a number of promising areas. An understanding of this literature will be of use to language educators interested in researching pragmatic awareness.

Appendix 1: Kazuko and James

A middle-aged Japanese woman (Kazuko) begins a conversation with a young Australian man (James) while waiting for a train on the platform at a station in Tokyo.

Kazuko:　　　お国はどちらですか？
　　　　　　　Okuni wa dochira desu ka?
　　　　　　　Where are you from?

James:　　　　僕は<u>ア</u>ーストラリアから<u>行きました</u>。
　　　　　　　Boku wa Aasutoraria kara ikimashita.
　　　　　　　(I <u>went from</u> <u>Aa</u>stralia)

Kazuko:　　　あら、日本語お上手ですね。
　　　　　　　Ara, nihongo ga ojyouzu desu ne
　　　　　　　(Wow, you are good at Japanese)

James:　　　　いいえ、日本語は<u>ありません</u>。
　　　　　　　Iie, nihongo wa arimasen.
　　　　　　　(Actually, <u>there is no </u>Japanese)

Note 1: In the dialogue above, underlining indicates grammatical or phonological errors. The Romanized script and English translation are presented for the convenience of the reader here, but was not included in the original dialogue as all participants could read Japanese characters.

Note 2: This dialogue was previously presented in McConachy (2018).